

International Seminar on “Harnessing Public Research for Innovation in the Time of COVID-19 and Beyond –The Role of Knowledge Transfer Policies”

Introductory Remarks by the Director General

Tuesday, July 20, 2021

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

Good morning, good afternoon and good evening,

It is a pleasure for me to welcome all of you today at the launch of our international seminar on harnessing public research for good in the time of COVID-19, as well as the launch of a new WIPO book on this topic.

At the outset, I would like to thank AUTM, LESI and the ICC for acting as our co-organizers. This is the first time we have organized an event together, but I am certain that it will not be the last. My deep appreciation as well to all of you connecting from all over the world. Your presence will help to enrich our discussions.

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We have a packed schedule today so I will keep my remarks to three broad points.

First, in every country in the world, the translation of research outputs to economic and social outcomes is extremely challenging. It requires the combination of quality research, vehicles that can bring that research to the market – whether they are start-ups, SMEs, large enterprises or other entities – and bridge-builders who can help connect the worlds of research and business.

Second, the challenge of commercializing or translating research into impact has become even more important as the global community now needs to overcome the pandemic and also build momentum towards the post-pandemic recovery.

We should not be deterred that the translation process is complex and technical – it can be, and has to be studied and understood well, so that great research can truly create impact in the real world.

WIPO has studied major inventions from airplanes to antibiotics; semiconductors to robotics. These studies show that major breakthrough technologies would not exist were it not for the transfer of public research to the market place.

Increasingly, policymakers from around the world are committed to taking a fresh look at how they support innovation and commercialization – including in mid and low income countries where many innovative ideas are emerging that truly deserve to move to markets and be part of our lives.

This is welcome. As past editions of WIPO’s World Intellectual Property Report and the Global Innovation Index have shown, throughout history governments have been the main source of funding for scientific research that has produced technological breakthroughs.

On average, universities and public research organizations perform more than three-quarters of all basic research in high-income economies. In middle-income economies such as China, Mexico or Russia, public research is responsible for almost all of basic R&D.

Today, we find ourselves on the cusp of another technological revolution – but for this to materialize governments must have the right information at their fingertips. Only then will they be able to support their national innovation ecosystems more effectively and strengthen knowledge transfer and innovation linkages.

And this brings me to my final point, that those of us with expertise in the field must be proactive and work cohesively to improve the knowledge base.

While there is no silver bullet, a more robust conceptual framework and improved metrics around knowledge transfer will help steer policymakers towards more effective outcomes. Likewise, case studies are invaluable source material on what has worked and what hasn't worked on the ground.

At WIPO, we have recently created the IP and Innovation Ecosystem Sector that is looking at IP from an economic and enterprises angle. It will focus on IP commercialization, and amongst the work that it does is to develop Technology and Innovation Support Centers with the aim of building knowledge and tech transfer capabilities and structures.

Many colleagues from this Sector are here with us today – including the authors – and my colleague ADG Marco Aleman, who leads the sector, will also address this seminar later. I would encourage all you to engage with Marco and his team, and reach out to them directly, if you are not doing so already.

Lastly, given the importance of connecting research, innovation and actual impact, it is vital, therefore, that we don't just talk the talk, but that we walk the talk and explore joint activities with the potential to harness our collective expertise.

WIPO stands ready to explore further work with AUTM, the ICC, LESI and other partners to promote effective knowledge and technology transfer on the ground, for the benefit of all.

Thank you.